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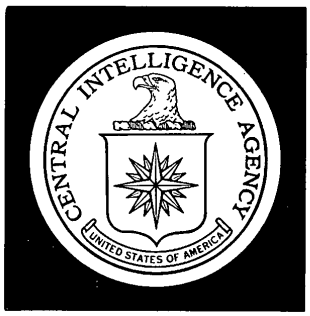

The President's Daily Brief

15 June 1970

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LATE ITEM

At press time, Associated Press reports that South Vietnamese forces have recaptured Kompong Speu. A late report from Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) indicates that ARVN forces did indeed make a sweep through Kompong Speu late yesterday. Actual control of the city, however, remains in doubt.

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

15 June 1970

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Fedayeen leader Yasir Arafat is making a bid for more influence in Jordanian and Palestinian affairs. *(Page 1)*

The West German state elections did not provide a verdict on Ostpolitik. *(Page 2)*

In Cambodia, Kompong Speu has become the 14th provincial capital to come under Communist attack since late March. *(Page 3)*

Prime Minister Souvanna seems determined to recapture Saravane. Meanwhile, a new threat may be developing in south Laos. *(Page 4)*

Moscow is disturbed by the increasing influence of fanatical fedayeen groups. *(Page 5)*

The new Argentine president appears to be a figurehead, and real power probably will remain with the military junta. *(Page 6)*

The Communists are brewing a summer offensive in South Vietnam with particular attention to the northern portion of the country. *(Page 7)*

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JORDAN

Fedayeen leader Yasir Arafat is seeking to achieve a paramount position in Jordanian and Palestinian affairs. In a press conference yesterday, Arafat claimed to speak in the name of the Jordanian soldiers and people as well as the fedayeen when he accused the US of fomenting trouble in Jordan and warned against US intervention. By retroactively approving the seizure of foreign hostages by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Arafat took the credit and responsibility for the action, which has been generally viewed as the crucial factor in the commandos' successful confrontation with the Jordanian Army.

Arafat seems anxious to repair his leadership image which was slightly eclipsed by the more radical leader of the PFLP, George Habbash, during the Jordan crisis. [redacted] Arafat forced the PFLP to modify its terms for the release of the hostages under the threat of combined fedayeen action. Arafat probably will have to deal with further challenges from the PFLP, however, whose prestige among the more radical Palestinian elements has been enhanced by its militant actions.

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The interim settlement arranged between King Husayn and the Palestine Armed Struggle Command--which Arafat heads--seems to be holding, under the guard of joint fedayeen-police patrols. Amman's uneasy quiet was threatened Sunday, however, when an armored element of the Jordanian Army attempted to move into the city. The unit was reportedly turned back by the persuasion of chief of staff Haditha, who appears to be playing the principal government role in enforcing the settlement.

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WEST GERMANY

The results of Sunday's state elections are disappointing for the Brandt government. Brandt's Social Democratic Party (SPD) fell one seat behind the Christian Democrats (CDU) in the North Rhine - Westphalia (NRW) legislature, winning 94 seats compared to 99 in 1966. In the Saar, the CDU increased its lead over the SPD from two to four seats. The SPD did manage to retain its one-seat edge over the CDU in Lower Saxony, however.

Brandt's coalition partners, the Free Democrats (FDP) squeaked into the NRW legislature, but failed to win seats in Lower Saxony and the Saar. The head of the NRW government plans to continue the SPD/FDP coalition, which will have a total of 105 seats.

The elections neither endorsed nor censured Ostpolitik. The results will encourage the CDU to attack the government's foreign policies, however, and Brandt can be expected to proceed with Ostpolitik cautiously.

The FDP's hesitations over Ostpolitik in recent weeks probably cost it both liberal and conservative support. Some FDP deputies in Bonn, however, may attribute their party's poor showing to its partnership with the SPD, which could lead to a split in the federal coalition.

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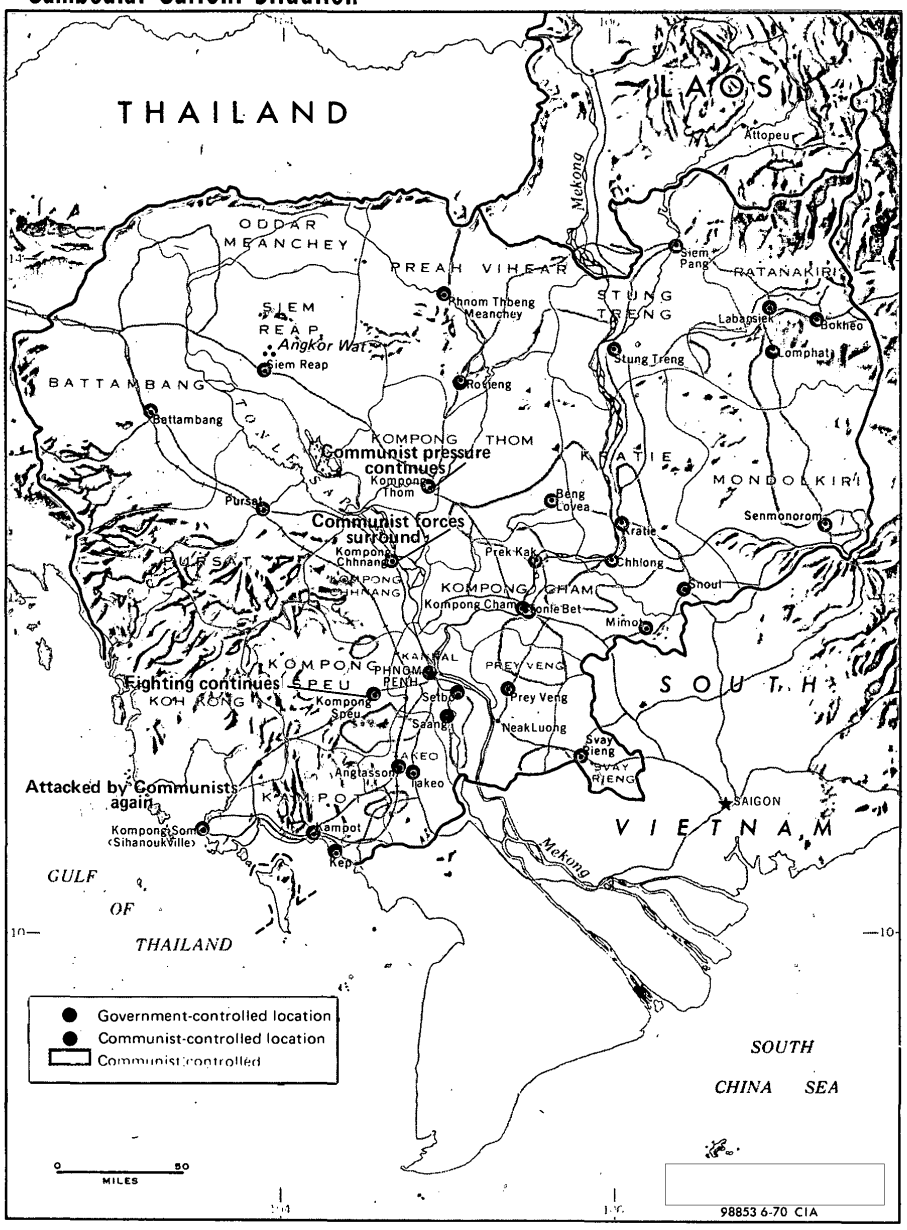
Cambodia: Current Situation



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CAMBODIA

Communist troops are still holding the center of Kompong Speu. Three battalions of Cambodian reinforcements supported by tanks and air strikes are maintaining blocking positions to the north and the east of the town along Route 4, while South Vietnamese troops moved into the area from the south. Casualties have been relatively light, but damage to the town, which is under South Vietnamese artillery fire, has been heavy. Elsewhere the military situation has been relatively quiet.

The tenacity of the Communists' attacks in the Kompong Speu area suggests that the enemy is placing considerable importance on interdicting Route 4 leading to Kompong Som seaport. Although the Mekong waterway or overland routes from Thailand could be used by the government to bring in vital supplies, the interdiction of Route 4 would increase Phnom Penh's sense of isolation.

Kompong Speu is the 14th provincial capital attacked by the Communists since late March. Four are still in Communist hands--Kratie, Stung Treng, Lomphat, and Senmonorom; only five have gone unscathed so far. One of these, Kompong Chhnang, is now surrounded by large numbers of Communist troops.

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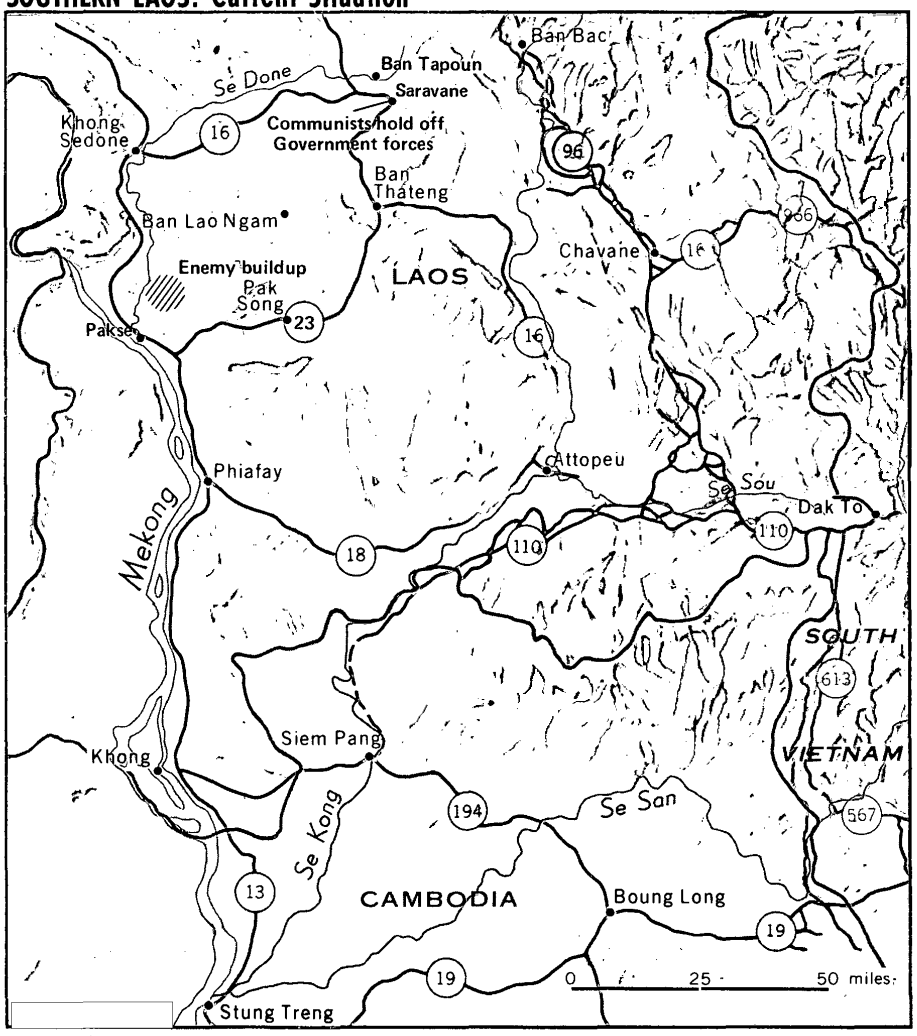
SOUTHERN LAOS: Current Situation



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LAOS

Government efforts to retake Saravane continue to be repulsed. Irregular patrols occupied portions of the town over the weekend but were driven out by an estimated two companies of North Vietnamese troops. Government forces located across the Se Done River at Ban Tapoun have been reinforced for fresh attempts against Saravane, and 150 troops have been airlifted into the area north of the town to block enemy reinforcements via Route 23.

Prime Minister Souvanna probably has ordered the recapture of Saravane to recoup some of the political loss he has suffered since the Communists opened the south Laos offensive in late April. Souvanna's unusually acerb and negative remarks to Ambassador Godley regarding the possibility of a South Vietnamese ground operation into the Laotian panhandle are good evidence that the welter of rumors regarding a rightist coup are beginning to get under his skin.

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A new Communist threat may be developing in south Laos. Villagers report the arrival of North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops in an area only ten miles from the Mekong river town of Pakse. The Communists reportedly are setting up positions from which they can rocket the town. The airstrip outside of Pakse was hit by rockets earlier this year, but the Communists have so far refrained from hitting the town itself. A new program of terrorism against civilians or a direct move toward the city would have severe repercussions in Vientiane.

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USSR - MIDDLE EAST

In The President's Daily Brief of 13 June we reported that George Habbash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was likely to emerge from the turmoil in Jordan as the biggest winner, to the chagrin of almost every other element in the Middle East conflict. We have now received two good indications that the Soviets are dismayed by the apparent rise in prestige of the more radical fedayeen organizations.

Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin openly expressed Moscow's qualms in his talks with Assistant Secretary Sisco last Friday. Dobrynin said that two years ago Moscow had discounted fedayeen strength, but that now it felt the fedayeen had grown so strong that there was some doubt that either Nasir or Husayn could make a peace settlement stick. Dobrynin said that unlike the USSR, most of the fedayeen are intent on destroying the state of Israel, and he characterized the PFLP as "Maoist oriented."

On the same day a Soviet Foreign Ministry official, Konstantin Fedoseyev, repeated this same theme in a conversation with a US Embassy official. Fedoseyev blamed the fighting in Jordan on "pro-Chinese" elements in the fedayeen. He claimed that the Soviets were using their influence to keep Husayn in power but admitted that if the fedayeen want to overthrow Husayn, they will succeed. Fedoseyev also said that Nasir is tentatively scheduled to visit Moscow in June.

Soviet criticism of the fedayeen probably is sincere. It is supported by other indications that Moscow regards them as a thoroughly unreliable and unpredictable element. Moscow obviously would prefer to deal with the established Arab governments but, in view of the increasing influence of Palestine guerrilla groups, will continue to maintain semiofficial contact with the fedayeen.

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ARGENTINA

The ruling three-man military junta has picked Brigadier General Roberto Marcelo Levingston as the new president of Argentina. Levingston, the Argentine military attaché in Washington since January 1969, will officially take over on 18 June. He is 50 years old and is a close friend of coup leader General Lanusse. Levingston is reported to have helped plan the military coup that overthrew President Illia in 1966.

His selection is further evidence that the junta will exert a dominant influence over the formulation and execution of the new administration's policies.

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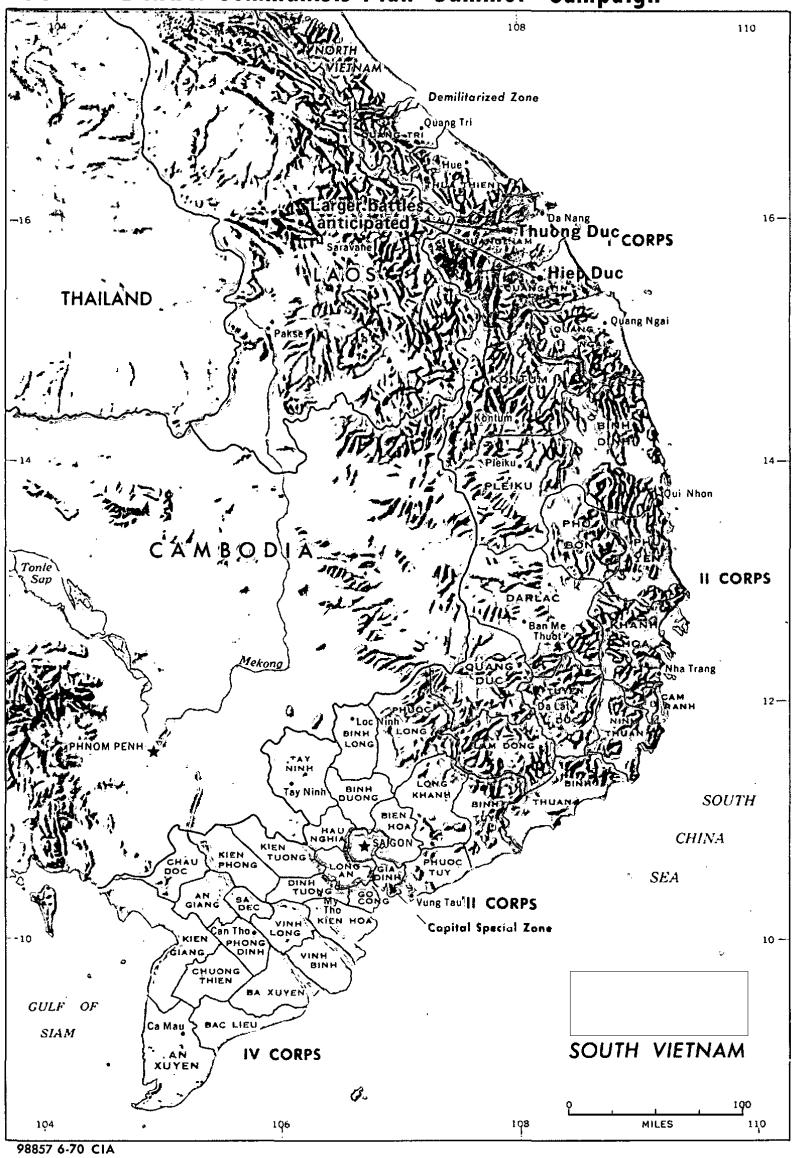
SOUTH VIETNAM: Communists Plan 'Summer' Campaign



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NOTE

South Vietnam: Intelligence gathered in South Vietnam indicates that the Communists plan to get their annual "summer" campaign under way in some areas of South Vietnam in the next week or so. This year's effort will probably be similar in overall intensity to the recently concluded "spring" offensive but with a greater emphasis on the northern half of the country. In addition to the usual rounds of harassing shellings and limited sapper and guerrilla actions, however, larger battles could develop as the result of growing enemy pressure against South Vietnamese units in situations where quick support is not available.

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